



State of Wisconsin
Department of Public Instruction
Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

GUEST EDITORIAL

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CONTACT: Joseph Donovan, Communications Officer, (608) 266-3559

Transportation proposals will send more dollars to classrooms

By State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster

Recently, I had the opportunity to spend time with school administrators from Eau Claire and surrounding school districts to discuss the statewide impact transportation costs have on academic instruction.

We gathered at the Student Transit — Eau Claire, Inc., bus garage to make a point: the cost of transporting students to and from school is eating into local education budgets all across Wisconsin. Under state law, students who live two or more miles from school are entitled to transportation by the public school district in which they live. For the 2004-05 school year, 597,776 children are eligible for transportation aid reimbursement. However, because the transportation aid appropriation has been frozen since 1990, nearly \$1.3 million in eligible public school district transportation costs will not be reimbursed for 2004-05.

Simply, the school buses that transport our children to and from school cost more to operate now than they did in 1990, but funding to support that required service has not kept pace. The cost for fuel, vehicle purchase and repairs, and personnel associated with transporting our children to and from school pulls funds from education budgets that could be used for academic instruction.

In my 2005-07 education budget request, I asked for improvements in the reimbursement the state makes for transporting students to and from school and changes in the way aid is paid for those districts transporting students the longest distances. The governor included \$16.4 million in his budget for additional aid, which will increase state pupil transportation aid to virtually all school districts. His budget proposal also will provide additional aid for nearly 300 districts transporting students eight miles or more to school.

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The impact of this increase in state aid is easy to see. Over and over, I hear from teachers, administrators, board members, parents, and other community members about the financial hardship facing local districts. If the state covers more costs that are currently incurred locally under revenue limits, districts will have more resources to invest in the classroom. Make no mistake, transportation aid has an important and direct connection to the classroom.

The governor's proposal for education transportation aid helps children all across Wisconsin. The governor's budget makes the right investment in our schools, protects property taxpayers, and deserves our support.

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NOTE: A complete list of additional transportation aid to school districts in the governor's proposed budget is available at < <http://www.wisgov.state.wi.us/docview.asp?docid=2542&locid=19> >.

Elizabeth Burmaster is the elected state superintendent of public instruction.

NOTE: To download a high resolution photo of the state superintendent, visit the Department of Public Instruction "Media Contacts and Resources" webpage at < <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/sprntdnt/media.html> >.